

Agritourism and local products in terms of protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians: a participatory discussion on key issues and challenges

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The article addresses the development of agritourism and the popularisation of local products as activities that can support the traditional economic functions of the Carpathians (i.e. especially agriculture). The protection of these functions is conducive to combining the preservation of the biodiversity, landscape values, and cultural heritage of the Carpathians with these areas' social and economic development, fulfilling the objectives of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians. Using a method of participatory discussion (i.e. the World Café), the key

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challenges of agritourism development and preservation of local products in the Carpathians were identified. Special attention was paid to groups of issues, such as: environmental and social dimensions, agriproducts and food, the development of local products, crafts and small-scale industrial products, cooperation, branding and marketing, and key trends and foresight.

Key Words: *agritourism, local products, sustainable tourism, Carpathian Convention, Carpathians*

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Introduction

Mountain ecosystems, rich in cultural and natural heritage but facing many complex developmental challenges, occupy an important place in global sustainability governance and are often addressed in international policy documents (UN, 1992; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003; UN, 2015), as well as scientific publications (Faracik et al., 2014; Jansky et al., 2002; Kozak et al., 2013; Maselli, 2012). In Central Europe, the Carpathians constitute the most extensive mountain range. It is a unique region in terms of natural, cultural and socio-economic conditions. Currently, rapid changes in this region lead to a loss of biodiversity, landscape values, the abandonment of folk traditions and the impoverishment of its material and immaterial heritage (UNEP, 2007; Kurek & Pawlusiński, 2014; Manea et al., 2019). In order to ensure the protection of this unique region and strengthen the local economy at the same time, improve the quality of life of the region's inhabitants and increase the activity of local communities, the Carpathian countries have signed the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (i.e. Carpathian Convention). Within the Carpathian Convention, an important role was assigned to agriculture and tourism in the development of the Carpathians.

Agricultural activity is essential for providing subsistence to mountain communities; moreover, it plays a role in biodiversity preservation and income generation and is strongly linked to mountain communities' traditional local knowledge and cultural heritage. However, agricultural activity is challenged by many inherent constraints, including geographical isolation, lack of infrastructure, difficult climatic conditions and fragile ecosystems, rendering production, marketing and development more difficult (Kurek & Pawlusiński, 2014; Széll et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, integrating agritourism into agricultural activities can provide much needed additional income for the farmers and contribute to economic diversification and revival of rural mountain communities (Szpara, 2011). In addition, it can increase awareness among the visitors about the cultural and natural diversity as well as culinary traditions of the mountainous areas.

This study aims to identify key problems and challenges for developing agritourism and the production of local goods in the Carpathians Mountains in the context of the Carpathian Convention's provisions. This study was prepared based on desk research and focus group discussion using the World Café format. The World Café is considered an effective method for structured sharing of knowledge in large groups, joint identification of problems and dialogue leading to the co-creation of innovative solutions (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). The focus group discussion took place during the session, "The Role of local products in agritourism: a Carpathian approach for sustainable rural areas" at the First World Congress on Agritourism (held on 7-9 of November 2018 in Bolzano, Italy). The session was attended by representatives of scholarly communities, non-governmental organisations, and practitioners engaged with the issues of sustainable development of mountainous areas and agritourism in the Carpathian Mountains. The large diversity of discussion participants allowed for multi-threaded analysis of the problem, seen from different perspectives.

Agritourism and local products in the Carpathians in the context of the implementation of the Carpathian Convention

The Carpathians are one of the largest mountain ranges in Europe. They stretch about 1,300 km between the gorges of the Danube: near Bratislava on the Slovak-Austrian border and the so-called 'Iron Gate' on the Romanian-Serbian border. The geological structures of the Carpathians reach a little further into Austria and Serbia, by some accounts, including the Lower Austrian Inselberg Threshold (Niederösterreichische Inselbergschwelle) and the Serbian Carpathians (Karpatsko-balkanske planine) (Kondracki, 1989). They provide a significant ecological, economic, cultural, recreational and living environment shared by numerous people (Warszyńska, 1995). The region is significant mainly due to its pristine forests, wild fauna, endemic flora, and its role in ensuring Europe's freshwater supply. Its rich cultural diversity is equally important (Kozak et al., 2013). Agriculture and forestry comprise traditional occupational activities in the Carpathians and have shaped the region's landscape and cultural traditions.

However, agricultural production has faced challenges in many Carpathian countries, resulting in reduced production intensity and the abandonment of farmland. Currently, the agricultural sector is undergoing reforms, including regarding land ownership and land use. Agritourism is understood as a form of recreation in rural areas where agricultural activity is still present. The accommodation base and recreational activities resemble or equate to an agricultural farm (e.g. fruit-growing, fishing, beekeeping, horse recreation centre) and its natural production and service environment. Agritourism initiatives from locals, often combined with the development of local products (i.e. products or services with which the inhabitants of the region identify, produced in a non-mass and environmentally friendly way, from locally available raw

materials), are being introduced in many parts of the region (Călina et al., 2017; Faracik et al., 2014; Szpara, 2011).

In order to jointly address sustainable development challenges, the countries of the region (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, Ukraine) have become parties to the Carpathian Convention – a regional treaty that supports cooperation in the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians (Szpara, 2016) (Figure 1).

The primary goal of this convention is to pursue a comprehensive policy and cooperation between the signatory states for the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians with a view to, inter alia, improving the quality of life, strengthening local economies and communities, and conserving natural values and cultural heritage (Carpathian Convention, 2003; Niewiadomski, 2004). The signatory states adopted the Convention in May 2003. It entered into force in January 2006 as the world's second multilateral international agreement (after the Alpine Convention), focusing on developing a single mountain region (Borsa et al., 2008). It provides a platform for cooperation among diverse stakeholders and facilitates the elaboration of policies and action plans in various fields of nature protection and sustainable development. The Convention is governed by an implementation committee composed of government representatives of each of its member countries and the Conference of the Parties (COP). The United Nations Environment Programme, Vienna Office hosts the Secretariat of the Convention.



Figure 1. The Carpathian Convention countries

Source: own study using the border of the Carpathians prepared by P. Kłapyta (after: Kondracki 1989).

Two of its articles concern the development of agritourism and local products: Article 7 - Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry and Article 9 - Sustainable Tourism. However, other articles are also indirectly related to agritourism (e.g. Article 3 - Integrated Approach to the Land Resources Management, Article 5 - Spatial Planning, Article 11 - Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge, Article 13 - Awareness Raising, Education and Public Participation). The pursuit of maintaining traditional agriculture, which is conducive to the conservation of mountain ecosystems, their biodiversity and landscapes (Article 7), as well as promoting sustainable tourism, providing benefits to the local people based on the exceptional nature, landscapes and cultural heritage of the Carpathians, are the key provisions of the Convention.

The Carpathian Convention provides a general framework, making it necessary to adopt related documents (thematic protocols) concerning specific areas covered by the Convention to provide the legal basis and guidance for implementing its general principles. The adopted protocols, like the convention as a whole, have the status of international law and should be incorporated into applicable local law by the acceding parties to the convention. The signed protocols are implemented through various projects and initiatives. The parties have adopted the Protocols of the Carpathian Convention on Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD). The most important (in terms of the analysed subject) information on their adoption and provisions is summarised in Table 1. Both protocols emphasise the need to implement sustainable development in tourism and agriculture based on a participatory approach and constant cooperation of various stakeholder groups.

Table 1. Summary of the most important provisions of the two protocols

Protocol name	Year of signature	Years of entry into force	Provisions of the Protocols most closely linked to agritourism and local products
Protocol on Sustainable Tourism	2011	2013-2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhancing the contribution of tourism to sustainable agriculture (Article 14) • development, promotion and marketing of regional sustainable tourism products, services and packages (Article 9) • enhancing the contribution of tourism to the sustainable development of the local economy (Article 11) • enhancing the contribution of tourism to preserve and promote the cultural heritage and traditional knowledge of the locals (Article 17)
Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development	2017	Its entry into force is pending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote agritourism and diversify farm activities (Article 14) • marketing of typical agricultural and rural products and services (Article 13) • protection and management of traditional cultural landscapes (Article 9) • promotion of extensive farming and organic production (Article 11) • maintain traditional knowledge and practices (Article 12)

Source: researchers' work based on Protocol on Sustainable Tourism (UN, 2011), Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (UN, 2017), www.carpathianconvention.org

The implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism is supported by the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians. The Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) has been established to support the adoption of the strategy by the countries. Consisting of three centres (Romania, Poland and Ukraine), it aims to strengthen coordination among different national initiatives and support them via projects.

The issue of agritourism is often raised in the context of protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians, including by specialised literature. The well-preserved, unique natural environment and cultural heritage of the Carpathian Mountains show the potential to develop sustainable tourism and agritourism (Ciolac et al., 2019; Morea et al., 2019; Mura & Kljucnikov, 2018; Szpara, 2011; Vîntu et al., 2016). Issues related to rural tourism, including agritourism in the Carpathians, are most often presented using examples from the Romanian Carpathians (Ciolac et al., 2019; Morea et al., 2019; Morea et al., 2020; Turnock, 1999, 2002; Vîntu et al., 2016), the Polish Carpathians (Bajgier-Kowalska & Tracz, 2019; Baum, 2011; Durydiwka, 2012, 2013; Kubal & Mika, 2012; Kurek & Pawlusiński, 2014; Szpara, 2011), less often the Slovak Carpathians (Melichová & Majstríková, 2017; Melichová et al., 2018; Mura & Kljucnikov, 2018) and the Ukrainian Carpathians (Kudla & Hamkalo, 2011; Przezbórska-Skobiej & Kudla, 2017).

The problems raised in the literature in the context of rural tourism, including agritourism, in the Carpathians concern, among others, activation and economic diversification and economic diversification of the mountainous regions and ways to increase farmer's incomes (Morea et al., 2019; Mura & Kljucnikov, 2018; Szpara, 2011): they present agritourism as an essential element of sustainable tourism development in mountainous areas (Ciolac et al., 2019) and provide opportunities to market products from Carpathian farms directly to tourists (Vîntu et al., 2016).

The social dimension of agritourism is also important and apparent in protecting local customs and unique cultural features (Turnock, 2002). The issues discussed in these studies also apply to the factors of development and diversification of the tourist function of rural areas (Durydiwka, 2013) and legal conditions and the legitimacy (abuse) of the term agritourism for describing the tourism accommodation facilities in rural areas (Kubal & Mika, 2012).

Among the many benefits that the development of agritourism brings are the revitalization of the local economy (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Idziak et al., 2015; Erling & Jarkko, 2016) and the social sphere, as well as the preservation of natural and cultural heritage (Zawilińska & Szpara, 2016). Increasing the number and diversity of jobs by developing a wide range of tourist and tourist-related services also constitutes an essential benefit (Schilling et al., 2012). Despite this, the residents of the Carpathian Mountains face challenges typical of the post-socialist era (Durydiwka, 2012; Kubal & Mika, 2012; Kubal-Czerwińska, 2017), such as the decline of traditional branches of the economy. In addition, service sector industries, such as agritourism, facilitate entrepreneurship and improve employment opportunities. This issue is related to Articles 11, 17 and 14 of the

Protocol on Sustainable Tourism. Furthermore, it can be a source of income for farmers, creating investment opportunities as well. Increasing sales of fruit, vegetables and other plant and animal products are extremely important (Dębniewska & Tkaczuk, 1997). This is part of the content of Articles 11 and 13 of The Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development.

No less important is the social dimension, which can be expressed, among others, in developing new skills, generating new ideas and innovative solutions, as well as in the emergence of new roles and a higher social position for women. This can significantly impact the sense of pride in the place where one lives. Observations made about the Polish Carpathians confirmed that women are primarily responsible for running, maintaining and managing agritourism businesses. Women's engagement in agritourism has enhanced their social role and facilitated greater involvement in community activities in the region (Kubal-Czerwińska, 2017).

The average farm size in the Polish Carpathians is 2.83 ha, including 2.19 ha of arable land (Musiał et al., 2010). The development of agritourism allows the survival of small family farms, traditional for mountainous areas. From an economic point of view, such farms are not very profitable. However, they play a vital role in maintaining biodiversity, landscape values (i.e. traditional cultural landscapes), cultural heritage (e.g. customs, local crafts and folk art, traditional buildings) and social bonds of the inhabitants in the Carpathian Mountains (Ciolac et al., 2013, 2019). This issue is covered by Article 17 of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and Articles 9 and 12 of the Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development.

In the Polish Carpathian Mountains, a lack of institutional support for farm activities hampers collaboration between small individual businesses, including agritourism activities, hinders networking opportunities and restricts the creation of partnerships (Czudec, 2013; Kubal-Czerwińska, 2017). In the absence of institutional support, informal contacts with neighbours, those between owners of small individual farms, represent the only opportunity to share experiences and best practices (Kubal-Czerwińska, 2017). The rural tourism service providers, local artisans and social enterprises require support in identifying their market niche and special business planning (Humtour, 2019). Strengthening links between rural services around the Carpathian region is a key step toward creating village hubs and rural entrepreneurship. The Carpathian Convention constitutes one source of support by addressing urgent societal and economic challenges in rural communities living in the Carpathian Mountains.

World Café participatory discussion as a research tool

A participatory discussion was organised to identify the fundamental problems and challenges in the development of agritourism and the production of local goods in the Carpathians based on the knowledge and experience of experts from the Carpathian countries and the agritourism field internationally. Taking

advantage of the First World Congress on Agritourism, which was held in Bolzano, Italy, between the 7th and 9th of November 2018 which brought together international scholars and practitioners working on the development of agritourism, the discussion was conducted during one of the congress sessions, entitled “The Role of local products in agritourism: a Carpathian approach for sustainable rural areas”.

The World Café format was used to structure the discussion, following specific thematic inputs provided by the Carpathian experts. The World Café method is based on the observation that people, defined as a group of minds and experiences, have the potential to creatively solve even the most complex problems (The World Café Community Foundation, 2020). It enables structured and effective discussion in a large group of people in a safe environment, and a peaceful atmosphere (Aldred, 2011; Sandell et al., 2016); the method allows for interaction among participants and the collection of valuable information (The World Café Community Foundation, 2020). By organising a conference session using this format allowed authors to raise and discuss many priority issues and provide each participant with the opportunity to join the discussion on an equal footing as a debater.

The use of the World Café is particularly suitable for discussions aiming to identify and prioritise issues of importance or actions to be taken concerning a particular problem area (MacFarlane et al., 2017). It enables a multifaceted approach, allowing the researcher to obtain the scope and diversity of perspectives of an analysed problem or phenomenon and can serve as a source of information for inferences in qualitative research (Sandell et al., 2016).

Challenges to sustainable agritourism development of the Carpathian region have been grouped into seven different problem areas, pre-identified during a participatory project by rural tourism actors and local handicraft entrepreneurs (Humtour, 2019): 1) Environmental and social dimensions, 2) Agriproducts and food, 3) Development of local products, 4) Handworks and small - scale industrial products, 5) Cooperation, 6) Branding and marketing, 7) Trends and foresight. Carpathian experts proposed key questions for each of these areas, intending to direct the discussion. The project “Carpathian Tourism: Cooperation of V4 Countries” constituted four ecotourism workshops held in 2017 in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

The discussion was moderated by the three workshop organizers, representing a university, a tourism company and an NGO, and the Carpathian Convention Secretariat, specialising in agritourism, local development in the Carpathians and the implementation of the Carpathian Convention. Representatives of all Carpathian countries and other countries representing different stages of developed rural areas (i.e. Canada, Germany, South Africa, Switzerland) took part in the discussion. Among them were representatives of various scholarly communities, practitioners in the implementation of the provisions of the Carpathian Convention, practitioners working in non-governmental organizations, farmers, owners of agritourism farms, local craft or handicrafts producers, and local leaders.

Results

As a result of the discussion on challenges of sustainable agritourism development and local products of the Carpathian region, key problems and challenges were identified concerning the seven previously selected thematic areas. The outcomes for each thematic area are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Main problems and challenges of developing agritourism and local products per the provisions of the Carpathian Convention

Problem areas	Context of the provisions of the Carpathian Convention	Key problems and challenges
Environmental and social dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preserve traditional cultural landscapes of high ecological quality, minimise the impact of tourism on biological and landscape, raise awareness of the value of the natural environment and anthropogenic threats (SARD Art 9, Art. 15; ST Art. 21) • develop tourism that respects inhabitants' socio-cultural authenticity and preserves their cultural heritage and traditional values (ST Art. 17.1) • support the synergies between sustainable tourism and local economic development, promote initiatives based on the local potential by enhancing the use of local products and skills and employment opportunities for the local labour force (ST Art. 11.1, Art. 11.3) • diversify the tourist offers by reducing seasonality; diversify local economic activities beyond tourism (ST Art. 11.3) • foster tourism initiatives that will mitigate negative migration and rural depopulation trends, contribute to poverty alleviation and allow for equal sharing of benefits and revenues from the tourist services sector (ST Art. 11.4) • build the capacities of locals to create sustainable tourism development project proposals and raise funds for their implementation (ST Art. 11.5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abandoning agriculture towards more profitable forms of farming; • misuse of the term agritourism by facilities that are not related to agriculture; • departing from the traditional character of agritourism and rural tourism and enriching the offer with elements foreign to the Carpathian tradition and distorting the idea of agritourism; • displacement of agritourism by more commercial forms of tourism; • low skills in project preparation and, consequently, low effectiveness in obtaining funds for activities by rural communities; • the need to stimulate innovation and take up new economic activities by the inhabitants based on traditional agriculture and cultural traditions;
Agri-products and food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote and support synergies between sustainable tourism development and sustainable agriculture (ST Art. 14.1) • create economic incentives for traditional land-use patterns and practices, organic production, preservation of local breeds of domestic animals and plant varieties and sale of local products (SARD Art.11, Art 12; ST Art. 14.2, Art. 17.2) • label, certificate, and promote products made by local breeds, plant varieties (ST Art. 11.2) • develop local food markets, shorten production and distribution chains, support local and regional economies (SARD Art. 13.4) • enable small farmers to provide alternative services (SARD Art. 14.2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legal restrictions and regulations curtail the serving of local products directly to the guests; • accommodation establishments and restaurants source their food from wholesalers and supermarkets, as prices are lower and can document the origin of the food; • farmers do not have a distribution network for food products; • food produced by farmers often has better taste and quality, but due to the lack of appropriate labelling and certification, it does not find a large group of recipients;
Development of local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop and promote regional sustainable tourism products, services and packages, in particular, those building on the common 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local products must meet the needs of today's customers; their products will

products	<p>Carpathian natural, cultural, traditional and historical heritage, and enhancing the use of local products (ST Art. 9.1, Art. 11.3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote the diversification of rural livelihood by linking agriculture, tourism, crafting and marketing local goods, arts and crafts (SARD Art. 1.3) 	<p>make economic sense only when there is a demand for them;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demand can be partially created by referring to the emotions of customers and presenting products in a broader natural or cultural context related to a given place ("storytelling")
Handworks and small-scale industrial products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop tourism by contributing to the preservation of local cultural heritage (ST Art. 17.1) • promote diversification of rural livelihood by linking agriculture to tourism and provide sound economic incentives for crafting and marketing local goods, arts and crafts (SARD 1.3; ST Art. 17.2) • promote, label and certificate traditional arts and crafts (ST Art. 11.2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small-scale handicrafts and industrial products find it difficult to compete with very cheap products imported from outside the Carpathians; • local handicrafts produced on a small scale find it challenging to break through the mass handicraft market; • difficult to define local products' criteria and features; • persistent lack of interest in opening handicraft factories due to the observed lack of success of similar activities in the region;
Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster cooperation between regional and local authorities, institutions, local farmers, tourism operators and other relevant stakeholders for the development of sustainable tourism and achieve synergies between tourism and the agricultural economy (ST Art. 9.3; Art. 14.1; SARD Art.6) • promote sustainable rural tourism and agritourism to create further reciprocal benefits and cooperation between small farmers, gastronomy and accommodations (SARD 14.1.) • exchange good practice examples on the contribution of and benefits of sustainable tourism development (ST Art. 14.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • villages' offer of services and local products is dispersed, their networking and ability to create comprehensive tourist products are insufficient; • planning and development of tourism destinations must be based on the wide cooperation of various stakeholders, including the participation of the inhabitants; • the necessity to select, support and promote local leaders who will initiate and lead projects that contribute to tourism sustainable development, including cooperation at the local level;
Trends and foresight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the Carpathian competitive advantages for sustainable tourism development over the other European mountain regions, which could be their unique selling point in the European and global tourist markets (ST Art. 9.2) • support initiatives that ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism economic operations (ST Art.11.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short durability and minimum time frame of EU implemented and financed projects; • local government officials and entrepreneurs often take into account short-term benefits in implementing development and investment activities;
Branding and marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve local and European-wide marketing and advertising of agricultural and rural products and services, which are typical for the Carpathian region (SARD Art. 13.1; ST Art. 9.1) • promote, label and certificate local products and local producers; networks, in particular, traditional arts and handicrafts, and local goods, including agricultural products utilising local domestic animals breeds and cultivated plant varieties (ST Art. 11.2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • residents can not promote their services and products and do not have a well-organised sales network; • training and activities aimed at creating branded Carpathian products recognizable on a broad spatial scale are needed • insufficiently exhibited places where local and traditional products can be purchased; • tourists are not aware of the value of local and traditional products; • small scale of ties with the place on the demand side by purchasing local and traditional products;

Note: ST – Protocol on Sustainable Tourism; SARD – Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development. Source: researchers' study.

Discussion

Participants (i.e. theoreticians, practitioners, and local stakeholders) exchanged ideas and examples and put forward detailed issues related to the development of agritourism and local products and the threats that limit sustainable development in the Carpathian region. The discussion revealed that thematic areas are strongly interrelated with each other.

Environmental and social dimensions

The natural environment and cultural heritage of local communities are the basis for developing tourism in rural areas. Agritourism is a part of the concept of sustainable development, considering the issue of social responsibility and the need to protect the natural environment and cultural heritage. Activities undertaken in connection with the development of agritourism stimulate local creativity, affect the integration of society and its well-being and are often innovative. Agritourism is, therefore, a very desirable function in the Carpathians and has a positive impact on ecological balance, landscape, and the level and quality of life of local communities in the long run.

However, a problem arises when agritourism is supplanted by commercial forms of tourism or other non-agricultural economic activities, which are often more profitable and lead the inhabitants of the Carpathians to abandon agriculture. The challenge in this situation is to support residents with educational activities, development programs and legal regulations (i.e. on the local to national levels). Stimulating innovation and economic activities based on local agriculture, craft and cultural traditions, taking into account the need to protect the natural environment and landscape, and supporting the preservation of the cultural heritage and vitality of the local folklore and the local culture becomes increasingly important. The currently observed development of social enterprises (Oriade & Robinson, 2017) constitutes an excellent opportunity for the entire Carpathian region.

Agriproducts and food

Food and agricultural products are among the most important parts of agritourism and rural tourism. However, agritourism clients are not looking only for *food and bed* but rather for experiences and stories from *behind the curtain*. Unfortunately, too many legal restrictions and regulations curtail the serving of local products directly to the guests and, thereby, limit the potential of farmers to develop agritourism (Kujáni, 2017). An example from Poland shows that many legal documents at the national and European levels regulate the provision of food services on a farm, treated as an additional business activity. Particular attention is paid in this regard to compliance with hygiene regulations for the preparation and dispensing of meals. Restrictions are noted, among others, in the Act on Food and Nutrition Safety (Ustawa ... o bezpieczeństwie żywności i żywienia, 2006) and the Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on the Hygiene of Foodstuffs (EU, 2004) that relate to the requirement to register

nutritional activity, carried out at the agritourism facility, with the relevant office and to ensure hygiene requirements at all stages of food production, processing and distribution (Kubal & Mika, 2012). Differentiating regulations for small scale entrepreneurs from those for the mass tourism industry would be helpful in this respect.

Development of local products

The development-related discussion focused on ways to develop local products and the overall effects of this effort. Firstly, the local product needs to meet 21st century needs; all local products from farms need to be marketable. Secondly, the local products should 'speak' to the emotions of the potential customers to be more appealing. The process of product development should be based on storytelling, especially when targeting 'millennials', who are often interested in unique experiences; moreover, evoking trust among potential guests or customers is a key factor in successful product development. It is essential to consider potential international differences in the legal aspects of product development, including access to land rights and regulations regarding catering services. Intergenerational exchange and cooperation can provide a way to address knowledge and information gaps, such as the lack of knowledge about marketing and product development among the older generations and the lack of knowledge and skills in agricultural production among the young generations.

Handworks and small-scale industrial products

The development of tourism in the Carpathians causes an increase in the demand for souvenirs, which creates an opportunity to develop traditional handicrafts and small-scale industrial products. Unfortunately, mass consumption in tourism causes cheap, mass-produced objects to flood the market, made outside of the Carpathian countries (mainly in southern and eastern Asia) which do not relate to the natural and cultural values of the region. Locally produced small-scale products are usually more expensive and will undoubtedly not replace the mass market, but their production should become an important component in local development policies. Supporting the handicraft and small-scale industrial products promotes the sustainable development of tourism, in particular, by maintaining cultural heritage and traditional forms of farming, minimizing the negative impact on the environment, as well as reducing unemployment. These activities are also important for creating a positive image of the region.

They provide the basis for organizing workshops and presentations related to artisan professions and traditional crafts (e.g. basketry, pottery, woodcarving, blacksmithing, cooperage, weaving), folk art (e.g. painting on glass, painting Easter eggs, lace-making, embroidery), agriculture and food production (e.g. beekeeping, making cheese, wine, wool processing) (this issue is discussed in detail in: Zawilińska et al., 2016). Handicraft products and local small-scale industrial products should constitute a showcase of the region and emphasize its uniqueness.

Cooperation

Given the multidimensional nature of agritourism, many different stakeholder groups are involved in its development. It is vital to involve them in the planning and managing of agritourism development and integrate their respective knowledge, experiences, and expectations. Agritourism farm owners offer accommodation and can provide additional services with respect to food production, handling crops and livestock, and local environmental conditions (e.g. meals, horse riding, sleigh rides, herbal workshops), while tourism agencies know how to market and sell touristic products. Innovation, sales skills, and marketing abilities are crucial for successful agritourism initiatives. Farmers often lack the latter skills, which renders cooperation more needed. However, the lack of awareness about the usefulness of cooperation is one factor contributing to the failure of agritourism initiatives.

Another challenge is ensuring coordination and cooperation between local governments, local associations with farmers and local entrepreneurs, which is necessary to maximise the benefits associated with the development of agritourism and ensure the production of local products per the protection of the natural and cultural values of the Carpathians.

Trends and foresight

The present trends are clear: mass and alternative tourism diverge. The ecological and social impacts of tourism are well known. However, understanding the problems and approaches to solutions differ among various actors. The target groups (i.e. the demand side) and the suppliers (i.e. services, agencies, local governments, etc.) have different interests and thus support different initiatives. One current trend is the growing portion of *soft* tourism, such as ecotourism, social tourism, etc. More and more customers are looking for uniqueness, depth, quality, responsibility, and sustainability combined in tourism (Gonda, 2016). The tourism sector in the Carpathian Mountains must accept this, create new strategies, and implement them. At the same time, rural areas in Eastern Europe face changes, including ageing, less educated and declining rural populations. These new realities should be considered when creating solutions for rural development. Alternative ways of tourism can play a role in this respect.

In general, the strong trends of the present will continue until they reach turning points, which can modify or discontinue each trend. These turning points are rooted in factors or phenomena, some of which can be easily discovered and others - not. Phenomena with low probability but high impact are so-called weak signs – they are invisible in the early phases of tourism development, but it is worth identifying them to prepare to deal with their consequences. Some of the weak signs of rural tourism and agritourism in the Carpathians will come from the progress of artificial intelligence (e.g. transport, agriculture, public services and energy optimization, toy industry), automation (e.g. jobs and direct marketing); free time boom (e.g. hobbies, leisure time, religions, social activities) and segregation (e.g. poverty, areas excluded from tourism).

Branding and marketing

Allocation of resources towards branding and marketing is a key factor in the success of agritourism initiatives. At the same time, farmers often lack extra resources, which they could use for this purpose, or do not understand the importance of investing in these activities. The education of providers (i.e. farmers as well as actors in the tourism sector) can play a role in improving the branding and marketing of agritourism products; at the same time, awareness-raising among target groups (i.e. consumers) is needed. The involvement of local communities by using various participatory methods, such as storytelling, can be helpful when identifying ideas for branding and marketing the local and regional products.

Cooperation on the local, national, and international levels can facilitate the branding and marketing of Carpathian products. The exchange of good practices is valuable for actors across the Carpathians to learn from each other's experiences and enables the transfer and adaptation of successful examples from other regions.

Conclusions

This article contributes to the discussion on challenges of sustainable development in the Carpathians and the opportunities that this area provides for maintaining livelihoods in mountainous communities, led compatible with the Carpathian development model adopted in the Carpathian Convention and the detailed recommendations contained in its thematic protocols.

As a result of the World Café discussion, many problems and challenges related to the development of agritourism and local products in the Carpathians have been identified. The most important points include: 1) the need to overcome legal barriers related to the production and distribution of local food products within agritourism farms, 2) the necessity of protecting local products from competing with cheaper mass production from abroad, 3) the importance of strengthening cooperation between individual farmers, local associations and entities involved in the development of agritourism and manufacturing of local products, 4) development of training for farmers and local producers, 5) diffusion of good practices, 6) certification of local products and creation of the Carpathian brand, 7) the necessity to involve residents in branding and marketing of the local and regional products and 8) the development of new strategies for the agritourism product, involving its soft or intangible element.

The World Café participatory discussion format did not provide for an in-depth analysis of the challenges mentioned above (MacFarlane et al., 2017); moreover, the results reflect subjective individual experiences of the participants and authors who moderated and observed the discussion. Nevertheless, the results correspond to those described in the literature on environmental and socio-economic aspects of sustainable development in the Carpathians (Ciolac et al., 2019; Morea et al., 2019; Mura & Kljucnikov, 2018; Szpara, 2011; Vintu et

al., 2016) and other rural and mountainous regions (Manić, 2014). Although the discussion did not represent a comprehensive approach to identifying the challenges of developing agritourism and local products in the framework of the Carpathian Convention, it showed a broad spectrum of problems that need to be addressed to implement the provisions of the Convention. Moreover, it was essential to integrate and document the knowledge and experience of practitioners, who presented specific obstacles, barriers, and threats and expressed the need for a wider exchange of information and cooperation among scholarly communities, decision-makers, and local communities.

The participatory discussion among the experts, scholars and representatives of the Carpathian Convention showed a need for follow-up research in order to build on the presented results by examining local' expectations and opinions, as well as the case-specific knowledge of the residents and develop initiatives and policies to support their activities for the sustainable development of the Carpathians. The issue of sustainable development challenges in the Carpathian region requires transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, with inputs from practitioners, policymakers and the local population. Moreover, this may require innovative and evolutionary approaches to the human-nature relationship to prevent destructive impacts of human activity on socio-ecological systems and facilitate a positive relationship to enable dignified and sustainable livelihoods of the future generations in the Carpathian ecosystems.

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